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SUBJECT: ERBIL: NEW KURDISH COMMITTEE ON ARTICLE 140, AND KURDISH REACTION TO FAILED PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS LAW

Classified By: Classified By: RRT Erbil Regional Coordinator Lucy Tamlyn for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

This is an Erbil Regional Reconstruction Team message.

¶1. (C) Summary: KRG Minister of Extra-Regional Affairs Mohammed Ihsan told RRT Deputy Team Leader (DTL) that all previous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) committees on Article 140 have been abolished, and one committee, called the High Committee on Article 140 (Committee), has been established. Ihsan said he will serve as Chairman, and that most of the members can be considered &moderate.⁸ On the CoR,s failure to pass the election law, Ihsan noted that Islamic or Kurdish nationalist forces could take power in the Kurdistan Region if the current Kurdish leadership continued to fail on resolving Kirkuk. He also complained the U.S. takes the Kurds for granted and should not push them to offer further concessions. The Kurdish public may be disenchanted with the Kurdish leadership, but the cause is more likely to be corruption, limited essential services, and unemployment, rather than Kirkuk. End summary.

New KRG Article 140 Committee established

¶2. (C) Minister of Extra-Regional Affairs for the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Mohammed Ihsan told RRT Deputy Team Leader (DTL) in a meeting August 10 that all previous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) committees on Article 140 have been abolished, and one committee, called the High Committee on Article 140 (Committee), has been established. Ihsan will serve as Chair of the committee, which will be made up of Kurdish members of the Council of Representatives and KRG and provincial level Kurdish officials. Ihsan said the Committee,s mandate is to represent Kurdish views on issues related to Kirkuk and other Disputed Internal Boundaries (DIBs) to the US, UNAMI, Arabs, and to Turkomen and other minority communities. The Committee will replace the Article 140 Committee in the Kurdistan National Assembly (KNA), chaired by KNA Deputy Speaker Kemal Kerkuki, and the KRG Presidency Council Committee on Article 140, chaired by Toilers Party Secretary General Qadir Aziz. Ihsan noted that the members of the new committee are viewed as moderate, and Kirkuk hard-liners such as Kerkuki have been excluded.

Members of the new committee are:

Mohammed Ihsan, Chair of Committee, member of Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)
Sa,adi Barzinji, CoR and KDP member
Khalid Shwan, CoR and KDP member
Rizgar Ali, Kirkuk Provincial Council Chair, member of Patriot Union of Kurdistan (PUK)
Rafaat Abdulla, member of PUK Kirkuk branch
Najat Hassan, member of KDP Kirkuk branch
Mohammed Faraj, KNA and Kurdistan Islamic Union member
Sherwan Hairder, KNA and KDP member

Kurdish reaction to failed election law

¶3. (C) Ihsan said KRG President Massoud Barzani traveled to Kirkuk on August 8 due to the extreme public pressure he came under from the &thousands of letters and petitions⁸ he received, asking why he had failed the Kurds in resolving Kirkuk. Ihsan also complained that the US has misused Kurdish friendship with the US by continually pressuring the Kurds to delay and compromise on the issue of Kirkuk. &Don't press us more⁸ he exhorted, adding that the issue needs to be resolved by the end of the year. Furthermore, during this period, diplomatic and military options would need to be considered. Ihsan added that if no solution was found by the end of 2008, the KRG would not be able to control the Kurdish public, which could react violently to the failure of Kurdish leadership to resolve Kirkuk. He said the public could also turn to either Islamic or Kurdish nationalistic elements in the next elections, endangering the special friendship the Kurds have with the US. When probed by DTL on which nationalistic Kurds could take over, Ihsan suggested Qadir Aziz, but could not come up with any other names.

Comment

¶4. (C) Although provincial elections are not scheduled for the KRG provinces, the failed federal election law is a black-eye for the Kurdish leadership in its quest to add Kirkuk to the KRG. The situation is exacerbated by the Kurdish leadership's continuing failure to lower Kurdish expectations that DIBs will be resolved soon. Ihsan's remarks regarding the disenchantment of the Kurdish public with their leaders may be correct, but in the RRT's opinion those sentiments stem mostly from the corruption, lack of job

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opportunities, and poor service delivery rather than the failed elections law and Kirkuk. We have heard more than one allegation that marchers in the recent Erbil demonstration protesting Election law 24 were paid or pressured to attend.

¶5. (C) Ihsan's suggestion that Qadir Aziz could potentially take over power within the KRG seems unrealistic. Aziz has a tiny following and appears to the public as thoroughly co-opted by the existing leadership. It is more difficult to judge the popularity of Islamic parties such as the Kurdistan Islamic Union and the Kurdistan Islamic Group. Upcoming KNA elections scheduled for June 2009, will) if free and fair -- determine their actual popularity. End Comment.

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